

October 26, 2006

Speech

Grand Opening of the 2006 Louisiana Book Festival and the Capitol Park Welcome Center

Delivered by State Librarian Rebecca Hamilton

Good morning! I trust most of you have been having a great time at the Louisiana Book Festival this morning?

I'm Rebecca Hamilton, State Librarian of Louisiana. I welcome you to the Grand Opening of both this beautiful Capital Park Welcome Center and, of course, to the 2006 Louisiana Book Festival.

The State Library of Louisiana, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, and the Louisiana Library Foundation produce the annual Louisiana Book Festival, where we honor and celebrate what is good about Louisiana's rich literary heritage.

Louisiana authors, or authors who Louisiana has simply inspired, enjoy tremendous literary achievements in fiction, nonfiction and poetry. The State Library of Louisiana, through the Louisiana Book Festival, celebrates and encourages the joy and wonder of reading, most especially in children.

What is it about Louisiana that inspires these writers?

Sometimes sleepy, often vibrant and dreamy, Louisiana instills a sense of wonder in writers and poets—inspiring them to tell stories, our stories, of huge personalities, exuberance, angst, joie de vivre, quiet reflection, vulnerability and triumph. The landscapes range from cotton fields and dusty roads of Louisiana's farming communities; to the

lands of cypress trees, pirogues and palmettos; to the blues and jazz of our cities.

Louisiana inspires stories and literary achievement. The accolades are many.

Robert Penn Warren taught English at Louisiana State University for seven years. During that time, he watched a fiery, charismatic politician roaming (ruling?) the state of Louisiana. He began writing the Pulitzer prizing winning novel *All The Kings Men*.

A youngster growing up in Pointe Coupee Parish relocated to California at 15. Missing the authentic stories of his home and his personal experience as an African-American growing up in the Deep South, he began to tell his own stories. The classic *A Lesson Before Dying* brought Ernest J. Gaines the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. And in *Mozart and Leadbelly: Stories and Essays*, Gaines explores his home's influences and gives us more short stories about life in Louisiana.

Take a look at New Orleans through the eyes of one of America's most beloved humorists in *Feet on the Street: Rambles Around New Orleans*. Roy Blount, Jr. brings the exuberance, characters, sights, smells and sounds of New Orleans alive with this beautiful traipse through eight different areas in the Big Easy.

The story of a pirate who worked with a general to save the city of New Orleans speaks to the very essence of Louisiana legend. The author of *Forest Gump* turns his attention to historical Louisiana in *Patriotic Fire: Andrew Jackson and Jean Laffite at the Battle of New Orleans*. Winston Groom writes about an unlikely pairing that had a significant impact on Louisiana and the young United States of America.

The State Library of Louisiana honors these and the more than 100 authors who have been gracious enough to attend this year's Louisiana Book Festival. You may have already enjoyed their talks in the chambers and hearing rooms of the Capitol. If not, I invite you to listen to these authors discuss their works. Schedules are available at Information Centers throughout the festival. The authors will also sign their books, following their programs.

Louisiana's literacy rate hovers among the lowest levels in our nation but can be improved. It's essential that we make efforts to grow a culture of literacy in Louisiana. The Library is committed to that goal. We recognize the importance of reaching children early and awakening them to the joy and wonders of reading that will carry them through a lifetime—this is where it begins! All else flows from reading. Economic growth, scientific discovery, medical advancements and the general well-being of a society all flow from reading.

By starting with children at an early age, the State Library of Louisiana believes we can grow that culture of literacy in Louisiana. That's why the Louisiana Book Festival includes an abundance of programs for children. The Young Readers Pavilion

comprises five tents filled with fun and rewarding activities. There is storytelling, writing enrichment projects, book-related crafts, photo opportunities in *The Big Red Chair* and face painting. The Young Readers Pavilion is in front of the State Library of Louisiana, on North Fourth Street.

In addition to the opportunity to interact with the authors or take your children to The Young Readers Pavilion, the Louisiana Book Festival has many other exciting events. Visit the Cooking Demonstration Tent and learn from the best: John Folse, Terri Pischof Wuerthner, Linda, Steve Bauer, and Tom Fitzmorris. Bring your damaged books or seek advice from conservator Renee de Ville of De Ville Book & Paper Conservation, who focuses on mold-related issues due to the Hurricanes this year. Joseph J. DeSalvo, Jr., owner of the Faulkner House in New Orleans and co-founder of the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society, is giving free book appraisals at the Antiques Road Show. Learn about papermaking and bookbinding from Leslie Koptcho and the Print Workshop of Louisiana State University's School of Art. And see *Inspired* by Robert Penn Warren in the State Library of Louisiana, an exhibition of monoprints by DeLoss McGraw. There are more than 80 exhibitors and booths along the surrounding streets and sidewalks to the Capitol. And, of course, a Louisiana festival is not a festival without food, beverages and music.

Louisiana: vibrant, alive, wondrous, mystical. A legendary place and people that inspires authors to tell our stories. On behalf of the State Library of Louisiana, I invite you to join us in celebrating all things books! Welcome to the 2006 Louisiana Book Festival.

